



WAR COMES TO THE DELTA

World War II and the Mississippi Delta, as told by people who lived it

In Their Own Words

The following citizens of the Mississippi Delta contributed to this study by providing oral histories that described their experiences during the years of World War II

Joe Aguzzi	I.G. Patterson
Johnny Allegrezza	Charles Pearson
Mary Jane "Totsie" Chase	Clay Rayner
Nellie Childress	Orlene G. Reed
Jack Ditto	H.R. "Shorty" Reynolds
Lillie D. "Jackie" Faulkner	Preston Riley
Armand Fioranelli	Eddie Roberts
Ned Fioranelli	David "Sam" Rossetti
Jack Gordon	Willard Samuels
Ruby Garrett Hollingsworth	Juanita Sanders
Preston Holmes	Clarence Smith
Charles Hutchinson	Charlie Welch
Wing Joe	Oliver Slayton Woollard
Juliet Kossman	Frank Wynne
Isabelle "Pinky" Maxwell	

Interviewers who recorded the testimonies include:

Mollie Rushing, Burrows "Bucky" Brooks, Daniel Cooper, Brenda Outlaw, James Spier, and Jay Hubbard. Special thanks are given to Sandy Ray, Morgan Shands, and Donald Cabrol, without whose assistance this study could not have been finished.

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This study was conducted by Luther Brown, Director, and Lee Aylward and Henry Outlaw, Program Associates, of The Delta Center for Culture and Learning at Delta State University. It is produced in honor of all those who lived through World War II and is dedicated to those who fought, and to the memory of those who died in the service of their God and Country.

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WAR COMES TO THE DELTA:

World War II and the Mississippi Delta, as told by people who lived it

changed life in the Mississippi Delta in many ways. Young men became soldiers, which almost always meant that they visited other parts of the US, and often meant that they fought in Europe or Asia. Other soldiers from around the country moved to camps and bases in Mississippi. Those who survived the fighting brought memories of their travels and experiences home with them. These experiences sometimes changed their worldviews, and often changed the way they viewed their homes and neighbors. As John Skates (1979) has said, "In short, Mississippians during the war were introduced to the country, and the country discovered Mississippi, and, psychologically, things could never be the same." World War Two precipitated enormous changes in Mississippi. It affected the worldviews of Mississippians and outsiders who visited the state. It affected the economy, employment opportunities, and job skills. It affected race relations and migration patterns. This booklet is designed to help you explore some of the consequences of the War to the Mississippi Delta.

What follows comes from the words of people who lived through the years of the War. These people are your neighbors, and maybe even your relatives. Many still live here. Use these quotes as you explore the impact of the war yourself. Think about the effects it had on individual lives, on local communities, and on the entire Delta region.

The War affected Movement

We had a big migration of whites and blacks away from here, because the job opportunities were better. People saw some parts of the world they never dreamed of seeing.

CLAY RAYNER

The War affected Race Relations

The black people went too. They were mostly in outfits that did manual labor like toting ammunition. When the war first started they weren't in no fighting outfits. We didn't have one black in our outfit. Not one. They got drafted also ...they weren't integrated with the whites until later. Later on everything got integrated.

ARMAND FIORANELLI

The military was just as segregated as we were in Mississippi. When I was in school in Illinois, the Negroes were on one side and the whites on the other. They never met. They had a black squadron.

FRANK WYNNE

Back in those days, farm labor, very few of them had transportation. We brought them to town on Saturday, and we took them back to the farm when they were ready to go home or when we were ready for them to go home. It was a little different picture.

CLAY RAYNER

The schools were still segregated.

The following references were used while preparing this document, and are highly recommended as resources:

- John R. Skates, Jr. 1975. *World War II as a Watershed in Mississippi History*, The Journal of Mississippi History, pp131-142.
- Pete Daniel. 1990. *Going Among Strangers: Southern Reactions to World War II*, The Journal of American History, December, pp 886-911.

- Keith Frazier Somerville. 1991. *Dear Boys, World War II Letters From a Woman Back Home*, Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, eds. University Press of Mississippi, Jackson.
- James Forman. 1972. *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, University of Washington Press, Seattle.

Everything was still segregated in the Mississippi Delta in 1941-1945. We always had a black yardman and a black cook in my home. We never had any problems with that. If there were any problems with other races during that period of time, I never experienced it. I was just a high school senior. To be frank with you, there was no social association at that time. I worked with them on the farm. There were about 15 families to 20 black families on the farm, most of them sharecroppers. They moved around. We changed labor every year to a certain degree. I never did have any problems; I can't say I can name any specific instances of interaction.

CLAY RAYNER



Clay Rayner

At that time there weren't any
Clay Rayner got his call to report on Christmas Eve, 1945. He was 18.

protests. They might have carried you to the barn and beat you up.

MARY Jane "TOTSIE" CHASE

Maybe we didn't know about the dissent between the races. To me, we always got along with people of different colors. And the people we worked with and that stayed with us seemed to have a high regard for us, because we treated them like human beings. But I'm sure some things were bad. I knew a lot of folks who didn't treat their help like I did. That's all I'm going to say.

RUBY GARRETT HOLLINGSWORTH

They looked at my service record and asked

me if I'd be interested in OCS. I said, "Yes." So they got me before six or seven high ranking officers and they began to interrogate me on many things that are germane to the war. One of the questions I distinctly remember them asking me, "Where is the island of Formosa and what command would I give for my troops to start off on the right foot instead of the left foot." And they asked me why I would rather be an officer than something less than an officer, and finally they asked me if I'd marry a white woman. I said, "What's that got to do with it?" and they said, "That's all Private Holmes." I knew then I'd given the wrong answer in Georgia. I was suppose to say, "No, I'd never touch a white woman." Three years later after I had served in Europe and Asia and was in California, they asked me if I wanted to be an officer. I said, "Yes." I readied myself for that question, but they never asked that question that time.

PRESTON HOLMES

The War affected the Changing Workplace

This was cotton country. This was really cotton country in those days. Fields were white when we came here. Blacks were picking cotton when we came here; however, most of my friends that were raised around here picked cotton when they were growing up. I never saw cotton until I was 15 years old. Now this is a big change, a big change.

JUANITA SANDERS

The War affected the Economy

After the war incomes increased. People were just getting money and spending. The business was growing. When we moved here, Tupelo was 10,000; I guess Cleveland might have been about 7 or 8,000.

JUANITA SANDERS

Things have changed drastically. Everything went along pretty much except everybody had more money right after the war in the late 40's and 50's. Things were pretty smooth as far as relations are concerned or economy. The economy was good. We made good money in our business at that time, and things were going our way, and then boom! Here comes the issue of race relations.

JUANITA SANDERS

Rationing had a tremendous influence on a lot of people. It affected us but not to the degree it affected people without agricultural connections. We did have a little bit better access to gasoline, to tires. As far as sugar, well, actually, we had a little more access to sugar. My uncle had a commissary. During the war, sharecroppers got furnish money. The blacks got what we called a furnish, the first of every month, starting in March. The furnish is what they lived on during the working season. My uncle furnished groceries, not money, groceries. Through the commissary we also had access to some sugar, possibly a little better access than the average person had. As far as shoes, we didn't have anymore access. Rationing had a big impact.

CLAY RAYNER



Nellie Childress

Nellie Childress was a senior in high school when the war started.

We were just coming out of the Depression; money wasn't plentiful. After the war, it got better quick. The economy got better during the war even though we had rationing. We had money to buy it; we just couldn't get the product.

CLAY RAYNER

I know everybody was happy when it was over. Most people started buying stuff. Everything was so cheap. My husband worked at the gin before he went to the CCC. After he came back, he worked for Mr. J.P. Thomas, he was a cotton buyer, until he left and went to Chicago and got a job. ...It was kinda hard when the war was going on; I know it changed for the better after the war. It was better for us here in the Delta when the war was over. The jobs picked up.

MARY Jane "TOTSIE" CHASE

The War affected Gender Roles and Relationships

I know a lot of women worked on the coast in the shipyards. I've known several ladies who would describe their chores.

RUBY GARRETT HOLLINGSWORTH

It was during the year he was out that I met him, and we got married. We knew each other a whole month, a little less really, I believe it was 29 days. ...Wedding was just enough to make it legal. We went to the preacher's house in Merigold. A friend of mine went with us, and the preacher's wife was the other witness. It wasn't much of a big deal.

ORLENE G. REED

Women were really needed. They didn't feel that women could do the strong things men could. They were needed; they were accepted. But they just didn't accept the fact that they could do the man's work.

NELLIE CHILDRESS

We had a canteen here. Greenville had a base for soldiers there, but we were too small. We entertained them down here across from Thweatt's Funeral Home. We'd have the boys to dance, and some of the girls went. We'd have refreshments for them.

JULIET KOSSMAN

I wasn't tough until I had to be. When I tell my children some of the things that happened all along, they say, "Mama, you had it easy." They think I was really spoiled, and I was, as long as I could be. But then, when I had to do, I had to do; there wasn't anything else to do. And that's another good thing; we had to do, and we found that we could.

JUANITA SANDERS

Things picked up; the economy did pick up. So many men were in service it opened up jobs of all kinds for everybody. Women started doing jobs that before had been done entirely by men.

ORLENE G. REED

The War affected Migration out of the South

I say the ones that left went to find better jobs, just weren't any jobs here, just looking for greener grass.

CHARLES PEARSON

A lot of people left the Delta because there were better paying jobs out there. Industries had not come to this area at that time. At that time farming didn't pay well. You just lived. Most came back; they were young and had their families or family connection, some reason to come back, and later moved to a better paying job. ...After a lot of workers went off the farm, they didn't have the day workers like they did, pulling the sacks and chopping the cotton, so they started upgrading the farm. A lot of the farm labor went to the cities because there were better paying jobs, and you worked from daylight to dark; and in the city they had six, eight hours, eight to ten in the plants.

NELLIE CHILDRESS

Very few went back to the farms. They settled into doing something else. I guess using their GI Bill to get into something else besides farming. They didn't want to farm the rest of their lives. Some of them had the opportunity to further their education. Later on job opportunities were better. Industry came into the Delta, plants and factories. And that's the reasons a lot of the farm labor went to the city, because they got better paying jobs and less hours, and they didn't have to have an education to be qualified for these jobs. They could get the job or training that was a plus for our communities when they started coming south. After the war, we felt the big effect in this area, and it kept progressing.

NELLIE CHILDRESS

I know a lot of people did leave. Everybody was looking for a better job. We didn't have any industry at all. I have a picture of me voting the bond issue that allowed Baxter to come in.

RUBY GARRETT HOLLINGSWORTH

People married and moved away. I don't think there's any real cause to move away, just to better themselves. Some did move.

JACK DITTO

The War affected Agriculture

The war probably speeded up the mechanization process in agriculture, cause the labor shortages during the war pointed out they needed help on the farms and mechanization was a way to get it.

JACK DITTO

We started farming mostly with machinery. Farmall tractors. No more mules. You didn't have to have that labor.

NED FIORANELLI

My father used from 12-15 German prisoners of war, most of them were Navy personnel, most were U-boat personnel. They were young men, and they were happy to be alive, cause 70% of the U-boat personnel in the German Navy didn't survive. So they had survived the war, they were well; they were being treated well. They were happy to be alive.

CLAY RAYNER

War affected agriculture tremendously. They needed our products, and they also needed our men. We were always shorthanded on labor. When a person became 18, he was gone. They drafted folks up to 45. What we had here was older folks and women and children. We were beginning to get away from mule farming and getting small farm tractors – mechanization. It did help that that came along about that time. Our three small tractors probably replaced 15 mules. ...Soon as the war was over, the implement dealers, John Deere, International Harvester, Case, Ford, they really got into the farm equipment business in a big degree. It had a big impact.

CLAY RAYNER

Most had large families, and the sons and daughters and the women mostly did it, and an older man who didn't qualify to go to the army. They plowed with the mules. The cotton was picked by hand, and they had mules with a planter.

MARY Jane "TOTSIE" CHASE



"Cleveland had always been such a good place to live and I guess it had always seemed to be a little isolated from the rest of the world so that anything that happened somewhere else wouldn't affect us. We were just too naive to understand the significance of World War II until the bodies started coming home."

- Alma Blaylock Malaby Frazier
quoted in the Centennial Edition of the Holivar Commercial
June 27, 1986



Ned Fioranelli

"Military service gave me a little discipline. Follow orders, you know."

Going away didn't change my perception of farming, because that was the only thing I could do. I didn't go to college. Naturally we farmed progressively; we bettered ourselves a little at a time. If we made a good crop, we tried to make a good crop so we could make a little money. Well, making a little money caused us to buy a little more land. First thing you know we were pretty good operators. You know, bought modern machinery. We kept up with the times.

NED FIORANELLI

On the farms back in those days, a man when he reached 18, physically able, he was gone to the service. If he was going to be cannon fodder, if he could walk and hold a gun, he was gone when he was 18. What we had on the farm to do the farming was women, children and old folks. That's why these German prisoners we had were so welcomed, because they supplied some young physical labor. There weren't any factories in the Mississippi Delta back in the 40's. It was basically agriculture here.

CLAY RAYNER

It was harder to get labor. My husband's father at Drew had Italian prisoners of war pick cotton that year; there was a camp at Drew. Prisoners of war, they took them out in groups. You paid for it just the same as you would anyone else. At least you could get some labor that way.

ORLENE G. REED

After the war, got better and times were changing. People started leaving here because there wasn't no cotton to chop or none to pick. And before that they built a camp here in Merigold, and they brought Germans in to pick cotton. We lived out here on Mr. Helton Smith's place, and he had some help to pick cotton, and we picked cotton with them. They couldn't speak English. They seemed kinda happy. They laughed. The man would come and load em up and then bring em back. They were real friendly.

MARY Jane "TOTSIE" CHASE

The war brought this mechanization thing. Some of the stuff they learned that was needed by the services was carried over into the farm equipment; technology was carried over. Industry came later on.

CLAY RAYNER

The farming was done by mules when I left; when I got back, they was making tractors. Before the war you couldn't get them; they was making tanks and stuff for the Army. They were rationing gasoline, food, sugar and stuff like that, mama and daddy were telling me.

JOHNNY ALLEGREZZA

"After seeing lots of South America, Africa and Arabia, writes Jack, "we've arrived in India. The trip as a whole was very interesting."

- Sgt. Jack Houston
March 26, 1943
Bolivar Commercial

The War affected Civil Rights

...on August 8, 1942, I was drafted from Cleveland, Mississippi, to serve in the Armed Forces of the U.S. I really didn't know what segregation was like before I went into the Army. I was sent to a segregated training field in Alabama, where I received my basic training in infantry. From there I went to Tucson, Arizona, as a construction worker in the signal corps. And then, after spending about six or eight months in Tucson, Arizona, we went to Texas. El Paso, Texas, to be exact. We lived in some little black barracks in a desert, away from everything. We were not allowed to go to the main PX, Post Ex-change; we were not allowed to go to the recreational facilities provided for soldiers on the place; we had to ride in the back of the buses from the base into El Paso; and it was the first time I really knew how evil segregation really was.

The Japanese, who broadcast day and night about segregation in America and how American soldiers were being treated, simply reminded us daily that there would be no freedom, even after the war was over. They themselves claimed that they were fighting for our economic, political, and social emancipation. We had to counteract this Japanese propaganda by giving lectures to our soldiers. That was my job-to fly from Lashie to Kuming to Mishinaw, Burma, to give these lectures. We were promised that after the war was over, things would be different, that men would have a chance to be free. Somehow or another, some of us didn't believe it, others did.

Amzie Moore, pp. 278-279 in *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, by James Forman, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1972

I don't think people change that much; it's very gradual. I've seen in recent years such a difference in race relations, and I think it's an improvement and well past its time to get here.

ORLENE G. REED

It was a blow, a big blow to white people. It was a big blow and a lot of people still have a lot of feeling about that, but you know, we haven't been right. The whites have not been right on this issue. We did not do right from the Civil War on up, far as I'm concerned. And it's odd that the way you are, where you are, how little you know about something that will change it. I took everything for granted. This is just the way it is. Didn't even think about any issues or anything, and then it just hit us.

JUANITA SANDERS

I was hoping I was coming back to world much better as it related to black people. They discharged us that morning about 8:30 a.m. at Camp Shelby. Came into Hattiesburg. I'm in my new clothes. They making sure you look good when you get out. June 22, 1946. We came into Hattiesburg; I had a good conduct medal, overseas medals, Sgt. stripes. I walked up to buy my ticket to come home and the lady said to me, "Nigger, get back to the end of the line." I got back to the end of the line, and then she sold me a ticket. I came into Jackson. Lot of folks getting out of the Army in '46. Changed buses in Winona to come on home. My luggage didn't make it, so I waited a couple of hours on the next bus. A black man walked up to me and said, "Soldier, I don't want to get in your business, but the white men in this town don't allow colored soldiers in this town after dark in uniform." So I got a cab in Winona and it brought me home on the 22nd of June 1946 – that's the way things were. There are some unwritten laws.

PRESTON HOLMES

It's much better. I'm not bitter.

PRESTON HOLMES

[Before the War] I don't care how much you can do or how much you accomplish; you're still a nigger. It's different now.

PRESTON HOLMES

Post Headquarters Building, Greenville Army Flying School, Greenville, Mississippi



PHOTO BY GREENVILLE ARMY FLYING SCHOOL

28315-N

Built in 1942, Mid-Delta regional Airport started life as an Army Air Corps training field. After World War II, the base was closed, activated again. During the Korean

War, the base reopened as Greenville Air Force Base. Although under a different name, the mission was the same, pilot training. Greenville Air Force Base remained opened until 1965 when the base was closed and given to the City of Greenville.

I was postmaster. I hired a white clerk who lived in Cleveland. My black friends gave me hell, but I hired her because she passed the test. Not only did she pass the exam, my black friends did too, but the law requires that you cannot overlook a veteran for a non-veteran, and she was a veteran. My wife told me, "She's not going to work for you." I said, "She might not, but for me to discriminate is going to make me just as guilty as I've been talking about the other folks who been discriminating against me all my life." So I would not discriminate against her, and I offered her a job. And just like my wife said, she said, "Mr. Holmes, I can't work for you." But the next morning before seven o'clock, she called and said, "Mr. Holmes, I changed my mind. I'll be at work." She came and she worked for me thirteen years. But my black friends gave me hell because they didn't know that the law said, and other black people passed the exam, but nobody passed the exam was a veteran, so I had to offer her a job. I did just like the book said. One thing I like about the federal questionnaire is that there's no such thing as race on it.

PRESTON HOLMES

I like to think the good outweighs the bad.

PRESTON HOLMES

At the American Legion convention in Miami Beach, every state and six countries. The governor was invited, and because I was state Commander of the black American Legion, they put me up to the top. The governor told the white Commander, a lawyer I didn't know, that "if that Nigger stays in the parade, I won't participate." The man came to me and told me exactly what the governor said and to placate the governor he told me he told the governor he would ask me to march in the back of the parade. I decided if I couldn't march where I belonged, I didn't want to march in the parade, so I went back to the Fountainbleu Hotel and I watched it on t.v.

PRESTON HOLMES

I think the war changed it. It put you on a level ground. They bullets don't know any color.

PRESTON HOLMES



Mary Jane "Totsie" Chase

Totsie Chase was six years old when the men in her family went to war.

When they [Black soldiers] got back, some were hostile and some weren't. Some had went over there and trusted their lives to make us free, and then when they come back, a lot of places they couldn't go. They had to take the back roads. Like all of 'em was together in the army. They was fighting together. When they got to go to a restaurant or anywhere or even the doctor's office, they had this side over here for the whites and this side over here for the blacks. And when you went to the drugstore, you had to buy what you wanted and get out, and the others were allowed to go to the front and sit at the fountains and different things and drink their coke. You had to buy your ice cream and come on back out. That was the onliest thing they were hostile about. Quite naturally, they'd talk to their wives about it, and that made them upset too... That's the onliest thing I feel they were dissatisfied about. Most of them just learned to live with it.

MARY Jane "TOTSIE" CHASE

I never did notice anything unusual about the situation between blacks and whites. You weren't thinking about civil rights; you were thinking about making a living to help yourself from going hungry. They were doing that just like everybody else.

RUBY GARRETT HOLLINGSWORTH

During the war, the army I served in was segregated, but I think the association between the different units in the war brought about the integration of the United States Army. I don't think there's any question about that. We had black fighter pilots in Europe. In Mannheim there was a whole battalion of black soldiers, transportation. They were truck drivers, I think. They were the truck drivers when Patton was making his march across Germany. I think, definitely, the war brought the two races together. ...Agriculture and the lack of education possibly had a lot to do with the races becoming desegregated. Their education was inferior to what I got. The average black who went to school in the north got the same basic education that the white people got up there. But the young blacks who went to school in the Mississippi Delta didn't get the same education.

CLAY RAYNER

The War affected Education

Things have changed a lot. Cleveland has grown. Delta State was just a little teacher's school, weren't many buildings out there at all, and I knew all of the presidents from Delta State. In fact, my children went out to Delta State. Delta State had a kindergarten and first grade.

JUANITA SANDERS

At the time, I was going to Delta State; it was then a teacher's college, which is now Delta State University. I went to school there for two years. The Delta was mostly farming communities; they had tenant farmers on it then which you don't have now. Cleveland was about the same size it is now – a little bigger. Delta State, when I was going, the girls outnumbered the boys; there was 300 girls to 100 boys; I remember that. We had dances and the girls broke on the boys.

FRANK WYNNE

We didn't have any mules. We bought tractors, a little Ford and a John Deere. One thing helped us a lot, me and my brother; the Army, they passed a law in the United States where veterans could go to school and get paid, go to school at night. We went at night, farming, farming school and they paid us, if I remember right, \$65 a month, something like that, and you'd be surprised in them days, in 1946, \$65 was a lot of money. So we went for about 3 years, and we got paid that much a month. The school was right here in Cleveland. Gerald Denton was one of the teachers. I never will forget. He was one of the teachers. I didn't learn nothing. I knew more than they did.

ARMAND FIORANELLI

And also following the war, all of the men that had been in the service had educational opportunities they wouldn't have had if they hadn't had service because of the GI Bill. My college didn't cost my parents a thing except for my first semester I was a freshman at Ole Miss, because of the GI Bill. Friends went elsewhere, all over the United States.

CLAY RAYNER

I went to Delta State. I went mostly after I got out of service. I went on the GI Bill. You got so much money for livelihood and course your tuition was paid for; that's the way it worked. They give you so much money to live off of; you had to work a little too.

PRESTON RILEY

"I drove to Merigold to get news of our boys there. In the drug store hangs a big service chart with one hundred thirty-eight names on it, and Merigold indeed is proud of all her sons."

— Keith Frazier
Somerville
Bolivar Commercial
April 3, 1943

No school for the Chinese children in the Delta before I went to the military. When I came back it changed then. We had our own children. They got through with the Chinese school by then; they were going to the white school. ...Even me, I tried to go to school in Shelby, and I couldn't get it there. They say that they just don't allow Chinese to go to school. We have to go to colored school or somewhere else. I chose not to go to school, so I went to Houston, went to school in Houston for a few months. I stayed with some of my kinfolks; they running a restaurant – that was real hard times.

WING JOE

Lots of things in short supply, clothing, bedsheets and lots of things like that. There wasn't anything really plentiful after WWII.

PRESTON RILEY

The mama and daddy would send you to school, but we had to walk. I walked from way back out here in the country to right there every morning if it was sleet or snowing. Lot of times, we had to wade water, but we went, cause we didn't have buses the same time the white children did. They had buses before we did. Sometimes we had to pull our shoes and socks off and wade across low places in the road and put our socks and shoes on to get to school. ...We had five classrooms, three on the west side and one of the east side. The professor lived in one. They just taught to the eighth grade and then you had to go to Mound Bayou or somewhere else. The black school was right over here by the truck stop. We had to go to Mound Bayou, and a lot of people didn't go. They children would stay at home, because the mama couldn't afford to board. They boarded in Mound Bayou. Mrs. Craig ran a boarding house. Some weren't fortunate to pay for their room and board, so they ended their education. I didn't go to Mound Bayou. A lot of them, when times got better, they went back to school and got their education. Some went back and got a GED.

MARY Jane "TOTSIE" CHASE

General Comments

I had no malice against anybody. Lot of 'em weren't able to go. They called them 4F; they had something wrong with them.

PRESTON RILEY

Merigold, there was only one town in Mississippi that lost more servicemen per capita than Merigold – that was D'Lo, Mississippi, down below Jackson. Their percentage was a little higher. We lost a lot of men from Merigold. One of my good friends was killed. He was killed by a kamikaze pilot; he was on a war ship in the Philippines.

CLAY RAYNER



Juliet Kossman helped the war effort by knitting socks and rolling bandages that were shipped to the men on the front.

The war made people realize what friendship meant; everybody worked together. The different churches had different things they did, some rolled bandages, some knitted, and some did this and that and just made you realize what you had and didn't realize it.

JULIET KOSSMAN

There was the Red Cross. We folded bandages and stuff like that. We did knitting. They gave us patterns and we did all kind of things for the soldiers. Lord help some of them, some the way they looked, but at least it kept them warm.

JULIET KOSSMAN

I think it made them appreciate more home when they got back. It was so much better than anything they saw over there. When we come down here, I don't think that people knew we were veterans see, but we come down here and started farming, and I don't know if they knew for a while that we were veterans. We didn't know anyone here. We just came here in '46, and we were strangers.

I.G. PATTERSON

I saw all the ships that was sunk at Pearl Harbor. They hadn't put up the tourist attraction yet, you know, over the ship, bodies still in one of the them, the Arizona. I told my wife I wasn't interested in going back over there.

ARMAND FIORANELLI

Everybody was scared. We were not accustomed to war. We were all so concerned. A lot of praying went on. I thought Roosevelt was a great man. He was a great leader. He instilled confidence.

RUBY GARRETT HOLLINGSWORTH

Greenville Airforce Base, It was 1941; I was about 14 years old. That Sunday morning we drove up to the gate at Greenville Air Force Base with the books. My mother had the letter from the commanding officer. As we pulled up there this soldier stepped out in front of us with his rifle, bayonet attached, stopped us. My mother being naïve as all of us as to what happened. Daddy rolled the windows down and handed the letter. The man took one look at the letter and said, "Sir, don't you know what happened? We're at war."

CLAY RAYNER

The Reality of War

The most frightening time when those planes was blowing up – that was the most frightening time. I was reaching up to get my helmet one morning... and it knocked me just flat. The concussion from some of the bombs just flattened me. I was shell-shocked during the times the bombs were going off... nervous after I come home. I couldn't stand lightning or thunder. I'd just go to pieces. I'd just cry and do all that. It still affects me. Not like it used to. I grew out of a lot of it – 75% of it. Lot of bad dreams, wake up hollering. I just up and walked around, got a drink of water, said you had to cope with it yourself.

PRESTON RILEY

The black kids didn't start school until October. The white kids went, but we didn't go. We just started in October and went 'til school was out. When they bombed Pearl Harbor I was in the ninth grade. I don't know who told us, but they let school out that day. They told us a lot of people had lost their lives. Shortly after that they rationed food. A person with a lot of children, they did good, cause they got more books than the ones what had a few children. We did good cause it was a large family of us, and we got a lot of books and could buy shoes and food and different stuff with those books, shoes, sugar, coffee. Homes were heated with wood and later years, coal and wood, coal, oil lamps.

MARY Jane "TOTSIE" CHASE

I was a battalion scout; I was the first man out. One day we was going up the mountain, and I got about half way up the mountain, and they went to firing at me. The whole battalion went to firing at me. I had a radio, and I called back and told em to stop firing at me, you're about to hit me. They thought I was the enemy, I guess. There was a cave in the side of the mountain there, and we was trying to get to that. It was full of Germans. They had one of em big guns in there; they'd roll it out and fire it. We captured that gun, what they call Big Bertha. It taken two boxcars, two flat cars to put it on. We got on the track, and we got someone with an engine to come in there and pull it down.

CHARLIE WELCH

We lost 158 men that day in those bombs exploding. The carrier caught on fire and burned for six hours. They gave me morphine which you're not suppose to give to a person with a head wound; it put me to sleep, so I missed a lot what was going on up there where they were fighting that fire. I didn't know anything about it until I woke up later. I lay down on the steel deck about third deck down, sick bay.

I.G. PATTERSON

When I was overseas I began to think I'd never get back home. It was just so...you'd look out across the horizon and you'd say, "Will it ever end?" I mean that's the way I felt – will it ever end?

PRESTON RILEY

After we got hit by the suicide planes, then we realized what it was all about. We shot down a few planes...after we caught 2 suicide planes, then everyone got scared. You couldn't find anyone around unless you were working cause when you're on that flight deck, it's all open – there's no protection. A carrier had very little protection. The battleships and cruisers are out there mainly to protect the carrier, because we don't have any firepower on there. We got 110 airplanes on there.

I.G. PATTERSON



I.G. Patterson

"I was in a bomber squadron. I was 21."

We didn't take anything on board the ship because we didn't get off the ship. We went in; we were issued our clothes. After those wore out, they gave us the first ones, we had to buy them. We didn't pull into any place to buy anything to take aboard ship. We wore blue jeans and tee shirts; mechanics wore green tee shirts; ordnance, I believe we wore white, and radiomen wore red. That way you could identify them.

I.G. PATTERSON

In the daytime, it was hot, and at night, it was down to 40 or 50...no cot, just laying on the ground. If you was out in the field, you dug a foxhole and lay down in it or either set up in it. If it was cold enough, you'd pull some dirt in on top of you, cover up with dirt. We covered up with dirt a lot of times to just stay warm.

CHARLIE WELCH

I got into it with one of the guards and then they locked me up in a little room, and I must barely could lay down in it. A lady fed me with a fishing pole. She'd put something to eat on that fishing pole; she'd tie a little sack and tie it on the fishing cane and put it through the window. She was a nice lady; she was a civilian. She fed me there for about two or three weeks; I got a letter from her after I was home. I couldn't read it.

CHARLIE WELCH

My wife got a notice from the War Department I was missing in action; it was eight or ten months before she heard from me that I was alive. I sent letters out, but she never got any of them; she sent parcels out every month. I never did get one. They paid us one mark a day. The value was eight or nine cents. It was marked POW money, and you couldn't even give it away. When I got back to the states, and they got everything settled, they made them pay us so much a day for the time we spent in there. Germany had to pay it.

CHARLIE WELCH

I was in prison with the first American that got captured. He was in Russia at the time, and they sunk a ship and got him out of the water. He said those people in Russia were starving completely to death. He said he'd seen them go out there, take an old bucket of grease, you know that they grease machinery with, and take their hands in it and eat it. Our kids don't know what hunger is. In war anything can happen; I think a lot of our kids would commit suicide if they could before they'd go through some of it. It takes a lot of courage. I knew what the days was and the months, but it didn't mean anything really. What I was looking for was something to eat and a place to lay down. We slept on straw, and they give us one blanket, and we'd throw it on that straw and the fleas would eat us up. I tell you; it was tough. You couldn't keep them off.

CHARLIE WELCH

At that time I was a 19-year-old youth. I came back out of service an old man. Some people ask me now if I did resent the enemy. I said, "I sure do, because it took all about two years of my good youth for life. I'll never catch back up with."

H. R. "SHORTY" REYNOLDS

On Okinawa, there was 38 ships sunk with Kamikaze pilots, and I saw 32 of em when they got hit. They thought dying was the think to do, and I was kinda like Patton. He said, "Heroes didn't die, cause he made them other bastards die."

H. R. "SHORTY" REYNOLDS



Frank Wynne

"I volunteered and went into the air force. I was about twenty."

We lost two engines on a four-engine plane. We made what is called a water landing, way out in the ocean. We had lifeboats. One of em we couldn't get out. One we got out. We stayed on the Pacific Ocean four days and three nights. ...We lost two boys who didn't show up. We assume they got shot and were already dead when we hit the water.

FRANK WYNNE

They captured the whole crew, and they took us back to Wewak. Then we went island hopping with the Japanese; we went to one island and another, and finally ended up in Japan. The combat soldiers treated us well when we got back on the island in Japan proper. They had a bunch of old soldiers who had been over in China, been wounded and weren't fit for military service. They ran the prison camps. They were tough. ...They'd slap you around a little bit. Every once in a while they'd get a little rough. You get used to it though. ...About 300 in the prison camp. We got two bowls of rice a day, that was about it. A lot of the prisoners got sick and a lot of em died. If you couldn't adjust to a rice diet, you was in trouble. They'd give you a little soup once in a while, but it didn't have nothing in it.

FRANK WYNNE

If you slept it was like catnaps. You just never knew the next minute, so you didn't do much sleeping.

JOE AGUZZI

August 27, 1942. I was conscripted. I had just gone into business for myself down in Greenville. Uncle Sam sent a letter says, "Come to see us." ...Well, in a sense those who didn't go, it never bothered me. I knew why they didn't go, and they knew why they didn't go. Look, I was conscripted; I was drafted. I didn't want to go. I went, and I swear, if I hadn't been an instructor, I wouldn't have survived.

NED FIORANELLI

I saw hundreds, thousands of troops on the train. They were inducted in Hattiesburg. They'd be packed going to ship out in New Jersey. You couldn't count the cars; they'd be so many of them, and they inducted them at Camp Shelby, then shipped them, and the train came through here. They'd drop the names and addresses out, and we'd turn out to wave to them. They wanted correspondence; they wanted anything. They were leaving, going to war.

LILLIE D. "JACKIE" FAULKNER

We had blackouts too; we didn't have a Christmas tree, during any of that time, with lights on it. We had blackout time. You had to have the shades down at night. We had rations, gasoline, had to have stamps to get shoes. You couldn't get hose. I just wore oxfords and socks. They rationed coffee, sugar, shortening, meat. You had to have stamps for all that stuff, and gasoline and tires. You couldn't get much that wasn't rationed.

LILLIE D. "JACKIE" FAULKNER

When they started bombing us, they started on a high level. Hit a plane and burned it. One of those big old planes blew up. The B29's had 8000 gallons of gasoline on 'em, and they were all armed and full of fuel for the flight the next morning. They went off about three or four o'clock the morning for Japan, about 15 hours up there and back and one of those incendiary bombs, 8000 gallons. I thought that flame would never go out, it went higher and higher. It blew up everything around me.

CHARLES HUTCHINSON

39 months overseas.

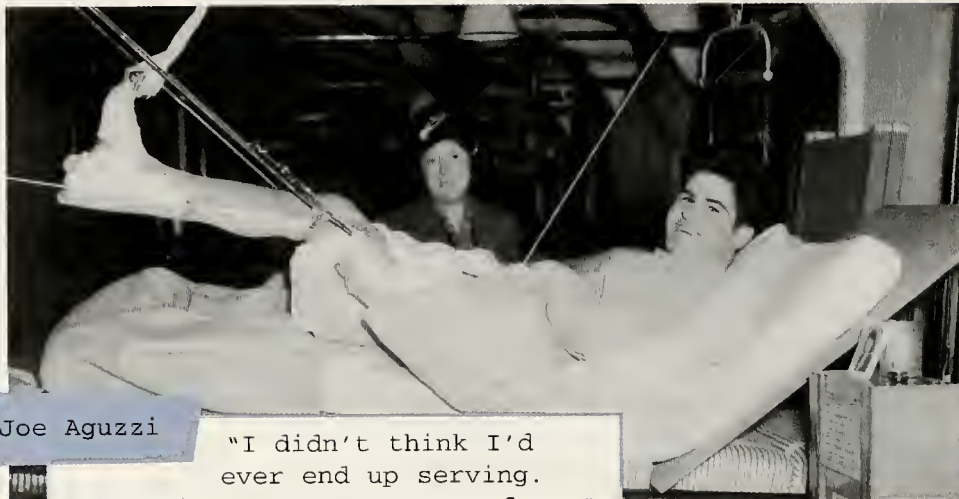
CHARLES HUTCHINSON

"On the eve of World War II, Cleveland, with a population of 4,100, was a shopping and commercial center for the 67,000 citizens who lived in Bolivar County as well as the county seat of its second judicial district. It was also an educational center as Delta State Teachers College (now Delta State University) had been founded there in 1924. Indeed, Delta State was the alma mater of many young Bolivar County citizens who were summoned to service in the Second World War. Its fall 1940 enrollment of 377 students had dwindled to 153 students by 1943-1944, leaving women to comprise a sizable majority of the remaining student body."

— Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, *Introduction to World War II Letters From a Woman Back Home*, by Keith Frazier Somerville

Rationing had a lot of effect on Delta life. Lot of people didn't have no food and no way of getting food until they got those rations. They got it about once a month. You got stamps for gasoline, so many stamps for sugar. Gasoline, farmers got a lot of stamps for tractors. Farmer would give him the whole book and use what gas he needs, and he'd libel have 100 or 200 gallons of gas over here that this farmer hadn't used that he had stamps for. If this person needed gas, that's the way the people worked together. Changed after the war was over.

CHARLES PEARSON



Joe Aguzzi

"I didn't think I'd ever end up serving.

...but eighteen came pretty fast."

I was in high school when Pearl Harbor happened. We were in a theatre, and when we came out of the theater, we didn't know what all the commotion was about. It was Pearl Harbor. I was probably sixteen; I didn't think I'd ever wind up serving. I was still in school, but eighteen came pretty fast.

JOE AGUZZI

One thing about it. This is always what I say at the end of my speech. War is hell, but also the weather is hell, the rain, the snow, the heat. The climate, you've got to fight that just like you fight the Germans or the people in front. Sleeping in snow, freezing rain, sleet; you get up and the Germans shoot you, that's terrible.

JOHNNY ALLEGREZZA

We took off from Gander Lake, Ireland, going over to England. We were about 10,000 feet, and it was snowing so hard you couldn't see the wing tips. I said something's going to happen tonight. I could read drifts on the waves and figure the wind out where we were. When we were half way across we got clear, and I could shoot... I looked up in the cockpit one time, and the pilot and co-pilot were both asleep. I blew cigarette smoke into the cockpit, and they jumped up and said, "Is something on fire?" I said, "Yes, I'm on fire," and I said, "From now on, I want somebody in this airplane awake besides me." Course they had it on automatic pilot.

WILLARD SAMUELS

...War is rough and you just do what you have to do in order to win.

PRESTON HOLMES

It don't take but a minute to become friends in a war like that when the bullets start flying. You become a veteran pretty quick. I knew two guys and we got pretty close. I was a scout. A scout is the first one out front. They are the first ones to get shot at. The day I got hurt, I stopped to dig me a hole several times, but we got orders from the back to keep moving. Bullets just flying everywhere. You see someone hitting the ground; it's kinda hard to keep going. Sweat was like raindrops. I got hit and my helmet went one way and my rifle went another, and they just knocked my legs out from under me. I didn't realize I was hurt as bad as I was. I had just passed a German foxhole, and I drug myself on my hands to stick my head down in the hole, thinking if I got it, it won't be in the head. Course the war don't stop where you're at. Everybody is still advancing. I lay there for 30 minutes to an hour 'til somebody finally found me. The medic came up and gave me a couple of shots, and I took a pill that you're supposed to take. It got my femoral artery and the bone. It caught my leg and evidently I stuck clothing enough to stop that artery, cause I'm still here. I lay there until dark; I opened my eyes; I saw where people were looking for wounded. I raised my hand up, and the guy looked around and caught that hand. They came over with the jeep, put me on the hood of the jeep, and brought me back to a field hospital. I still didn't know I was hurt as bad as I was. They worked on us there. ...They gave me penicillin shots every three hours, and three or four doctors would come in to see if I could wiggle my toes. Me, I'm still 18; it didn't dawn on me they were debating whether to cut that leg off.

JOE AGUZZI

On December 24, 1944, we flew the biggest raid that was ever flown in World War II. Every airplane that could fly took off that day. We had over 1500 planes in the air. We were hoping their planes would come up and fight and we'd bomb about seven or eight airfields, and they wouldn't have any place to land. They never came up. Going home that night, this colonel with us said, "Give me the straightest shot back." I said, "Colonel, we're going as straight as we can," and when we got there the weather was socked in England, bad. Our base was the only base open. We went straight in and got our group on the ground. It was just about dark, 100 planes came into our base that night. They were flying around with their landing lights on. It looked like a Christmas tree in the air; it was Christmas Eve, and it was my birthday, and I was so happy to be on the ground. It made an impression I'll never forget, seeing those planes with their landing lights on; it looked like Christmas trees flying around in the air.

WILLARD SAMUELS

I volunteered when I was in the 8th grade. I was seventeen years old in Greenwood, Mississippi. We told them we were eighteen. I went to Fort McClelland, Alabama. My parents approved; we had to get their permission to join. My twin brother went three years later. I was in the infantry; I didn't know what it was all about, and I wanted to fight. Young boy, didn't have no sense.

JOHNNY ALLEGREZZA

The Germans were pretty decent people. Bout four or five o'clock everything was settle down, they'd let us pick up our dead, and we'd let them pick up their dead. We got to so we'd do each other that way. We'd talk to em with walkie-talkies. We tell em, "If yall won't fight, we won't fight; you pick up your dead, we'll pick up our dead." And they did. They'd give us a little break, and the next morning we'd say, "We're coming after you." "We're going to wait for you," they'd tell us. All the German officers spoke English... The people in the countryside were kind and good people. They'd bring a picture of their son and ask me not to kill him, and I'd say, "If you don't want me to kill your boy, you go get him and bring him here and let him surrender," and they'd go get him and bring him and bring ten, fifteen, sometime 30 boys with him. They didn't want us to kill their sons. They'd go get their boys and make them surrender. We didn't mistreat them.

JOHNNY ALLEGREZZA



Johnny Allegrezza

"I volunteered when I was in the 8th grade."

You can't fight a war with 40-year-olds. With eighteen-year-olds you do what you're told. Today I wouldn't do what I done. I wouldn't have to. So many things have to be done in war. If you're up on the lines, you're not going to get many volunteers. It's like suicide. I wouldn't do it again. I'm not that brave. That's why you have eighteen-year-olds; you don't ever think it's going to happen to you. I was scared there then.

JOE AGUZZI

When we went to invade the Philippines, late in the second day, I was there with McArthur. They Navy ships had already bombarded. One of our sister ships was blown up. I volunteered to go there, scattered fighting. We stayed in the Philippines for the duration. The jungle was real rough, real thick, always hot and damp. When we first got to New Guinea it was monsoon rain, 42 days and 42 nights, solid rain. It never stopped; no way you could get dry. You can't fight. More people got sick and jungle rot, malaria. They made you take adavan tablets every day with meals. No way to treat jungle rot. Those adavan tablets made your hands turn yellow. Nobody in my company died. A lot got sick and had to come home.

WING JOE

The night before, we're Catholic, we all went to communion, confession, and got ourselves straight with the Lord, and we prayed together that night and we hoped we'd make it, some of us didn't. I lost my whole squad, five men. I lost them all. I still think about the boys, my buddies; we was together five years. We was like brothers; it was hard to lose them, overnight. It wasn't but 21 miles across the English Channel. That morning at 5:00 we hit the beach, thousands and thousands of us. My company hit it first; bombs and artillery came in later. The paratroopers landed that morning at 4:00. I encountered water waist high. Couldn't get close, they were shooting at us. I said, "Lord, let me get that beach, if I make this beach, I'm gonna make this war." I didn't want to get killed in the water. They were dead in the water, bumping each other, bumping into us. We had to push them out of the way. They were dead. We couldn't stop. It took 30 minutes to get to the beach, wade water, unprotected. We landed on Utah beach. We run, wade the water, my platoon made it on the beach. My Sgt. got hit and I took over; I was the Sgt. We give first aid, but we got to go. If we stay still, they're coming to get us. It was a long day for me. We slept that night after we got on the beaches in a little break of woods. The next morning we'd get all organized and go forward again.

JOHNNY ALLEGREZZA

"Why up at Mound Bayou during March they bought more war bonds than either Cleveland or Rosedale!"

- Keith Frasier
Somerville
Bolivar Commercial
April 23, 1943

When you're in the infantry, you're there until you either get wounded or killed. It's day and night, 24 hours a day until you're either wounded or killed, so that's a long time. Sleeping on the ground your helmet's your pillow whatever sleep you get.

JOE AGUZZI

The War affected Small Towns

The roads were all gravel. They built Highway 8 right after the war. They improved it a lot. Most of the other roads were gravel roads.

ARMAND FIORANELLI

The Delta was about like it was when I left. They only thing I saw was different, they had German soldiers [prisoners of war] out there in the fields instead of blacks.

FRANK WYNNE

Many were leaving, so many machines were coming in and then they didn't have jobs and so many were denied jobs. They'd go to a place and ask if they were hiring, and they told them no, and so many of their buddies and friends that was white would go there, and they were hired, and they'd come back and tell them, and that just made em so they said we'd just go on out and go somewhere else, and that's one reason most of them started leaving. They were denied jobs. A lot of them then took their families. Everybody was leaving off the farms, and wasn't nothing to do but tear down the houses cause there wasn't anybody in them. After that there wasn't nothing in the country just the land and not no lot of houses like there used to be.

MARY Jane "TOTSIE" CHASE

When I came back I just wanted more than what I had, cause we didn't have anything. I thought we were poorer than anybody. I could see people who didn't have what we had and they'd get 50 cents to go to a movie, and we didn't get the 50 cents to go to a movie, so I thought we were poorer than them. I found out later that daddy could have gave us 50 cents, but he wasn't sure he didn't need that 50 cents somewhere else, so we didn't get it.

JOE AGUZZI

It wasn't a whole lot different. Times were changing. Time was getting better. Before the war nobody had anything. You began to see everybody prosper a little, so you thought things were going to keep getting better.

JOE AGUZZI

When I came to Cleveland, MS, in 1946, population was less than 5000. When I was in high school, Clarksdale was 12000 and Cleveland was about 2000, maybe. Delta State had maybe 500 students. All gravel roads; they paved a few when I got back. The next ten years was when it really progressed. Delta State was on the fringe of Cleveland. ...city grew after the war.

WILLARD SAMUELS

The Delta has changed. There's electric lights, plumbing, cable television. We don't have the railroad system or bus system, but there's two or three cars to each family. We're getting better pay. I worked during the war at the bus station for \$25 a week and meals. ...Things have changed so much. We had a lot of merchants then that we don't have now. Things were localized. I can think of a lot of places we don't have any more.

NELLIE CHILDRESS

[Before the War] You just can't get no money. Mostly had to raise their own foods or they starving. Mostly gravel roads even 61. After the war, they were paved.

WING JOE

Nothing but cotton, maybe a little corn, cotton was the main thing. At one time this town had five gins. That's a lot of gins for a small town.

ISABELLE 'PINKY' MAXWELL

Ending Comments

In the South then, the war planted seeds that hastened the development of a new agricultural structure, intensified urbanization, and launched a civil rights movement. The war, more than the New Deal, ended hard times for many southerners, and during the war the role of the federal government, enlarged to fight depression, expanded and became ever more critical in reshaping southern culture.

Pete Daniel, *Journal Of American History*, 1990.

...in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, I found America dreaming again. Dreaming of the day her sons will come marching home; dreaming of better housing and hospitalization; dreaming of the day when education will really "educate" our farm boys to be made better farmers, proud and happy in their life work, in the dignity of plowing their acres and working with their hands, as the Lord intended 80% of us to do. Dreaming too, of absolute fairness. And here in Bolivar County there are many southern white men and women, descendants of men and women who for 80 years have had their problems close to their hearts, who are dreaming with them that when our boys of all races, creeds and color come home again to peaceful years, we may all work together to make our dreams come true.

Keith Frazier Somerville, *Bolivar Commercial*, April 23, 1943

We got freedoms here that we waste more than most people had. The freedom we got came high, but we still got it. We're gonna keep it.

CHARLIE WELCH

War is not a thing to be happy about, but I was glad to serve my country.

H. R. "SHORTY" REYNOLDS

They've had several reunions. I never have gone back. They were way off somewhere. I kept in contact with those in my plane. They're all dead now. I'm 84 years old; I was just a youngster.

FRANK WYNNE

Frankly I don't consider I'm old, that's what's so ridiculous, because I am. I'm 85. I am old. I don't consider myself elderly, but hell I am. I am very elderly.

ISABELLE 'PINKY' MAXWELL

Time had dulled a lot of memories. We had a real good time. We had good people.

The draft brought in good people. You got people who fall by the wayside, but as a whole, we had real good people. That's the backbone of America.

JACK DITTO

Each generation changes. There's no generation the same; one might be good and the next, ain't no telling what going to happen, and the following generation's a good generation. You can't compare the people. Each generation changes. It might be good or the worse, but it's not going to stay the same.

CHARLES PEARSON

I've had dreams about it. Glad I don't have them too often. Long time, I don't any more. If I hear guns shot, I'd automatically jump. I don't do that too much anymore. I have had dreams, and it's so good to wake up and know it's not true.

JOE AGUZZI

"The draft board refuses to tell how many of our colored boys have gone into the armed forces, but we all know there are thousands of them from Bolivar County, and many additional hundreds have volunteered."

- Keith Frazier
Somerville
Bolivar Commercial
April 23, 1943

My overall military experience was more plus than minus. You see, when you learn to live with a situation, good or bad, you learn to adjust. A whole lot of folks think adjusting is not the thing to do. Going along to get along is what I did. I don't know if it's the right procedure.

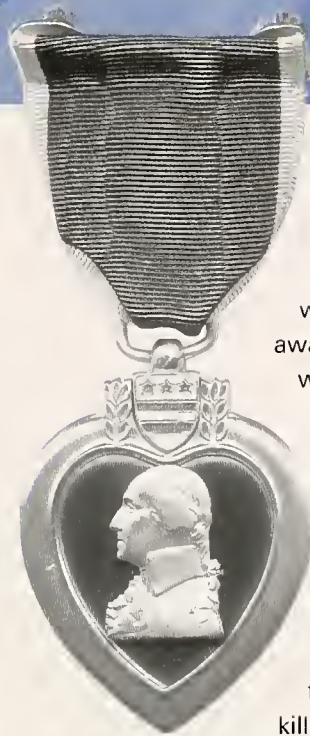
PRESTON HOLMES

It's been interesting, and it's been fun all these years. I don't regret a one of them; they've all been good years. Life is really not that much different than it was then. Children still grow up.

ORLENE G. REED

The war brought everybody together. I just saw Americans.

CHARLES PEARSON



The Purple Heart

The Purple Heart is an American decoration—the oldest military decoration in the world in present use and the first American award made available to the common soldier. It was initially created as the Badge of Military Merit by one of the world's most famed and best-loved heroes—General George Washington.

The PURPLE HEART is awarded to members of the armed forces of the U.S. who are wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy and posthumously to the next of kin in the name of those who are killed in action or die of wounds received in action. It is specifically a combat decoration.

This Purple Heart belonged to I.G. Patterson. Many of our Delta Veterans received this honor.

The Delta Center *for Culture & Learning*

The Delta Center for Culture and Learning is an interdisciplinary unit within Delta State University, whose mission is to promote a broad understanding of the history and culture of the Mississippi Delta and its significance to the rest of the world. We fulfill this mission through a combination of classes, field trips and tours, oral history projects, historic preservation efforts, and service learning and community outreach programs.

The Delta Center works regularly with students from Delta State and visiting universities. We have recently worked with Yale, Harvard, The University of Michigan, Vanderbilt, Millsaps College, Baldwin Wallace College, Florida Atlantic, Brandeis, George Mason, and other schools. We have worked with the Mississippi Humanities Council, the University of Mississippi, and the Mississippi Arts Commission on various projects. We are the home of the Delta State Blues Band, the Blues Highway Association, and the annual Peavine Awards commemorating excellence in the Delta Blues.

The Delta Center *for Culture and Learning*
Box 3152
Delta State University
Cleveland, Mississippi 38733

662-846-4311
www.blueshighway.org

Dr. Luther Brown, Director

The Delta Center
for Culture & Learning

Delta State University
Box 3152 Cleveland, MS 38733
phone: 662-846-4312
mailto:lbrown@deltastate.edu
www.blueshighway.org